

NEWS

FROM YOUR MUSEUM

THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

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1 PALESTINE FROM ABRAHAM TO YESTERDAY

The present disturbances in Palestine awaken interest in its history which may be traced in the Royal Ontario Museum over a period of 5,000 years. There are cups and bowls which Abraham might have used; "pieces of silver" and the "widow's mite" of the time of Christ; garments worn in the nineteenth century but of types that were current in the time of our Lord; wooden ploughs, again of modern make, but identical in design with those that David knew. These and many other objects illustrating the life and art of Palestine will appear in a special exhibition to be held in the Museum between January 20th and February 17th under the joint auspices of the Museum and the Canadian Jewish Congress. For this occasion the Museum Collection will be supplemented by many fine manuscripts and early printed Jewish books, jewelry and ceremonial objects loaned by owners both in Canada and the United States.

2 URANIUM, THE SOURCE OF ATOMIC ENERGY

Uranium, the basis of the atomic bomb, is a heavy element of complex atomic structure. In an uranium compound, radium was found by the Curies. This compound slowly gives off radium emanations, thereby undergoing a change in composition. On the basis of this information uranium was chosen as the substance to be bombarded with neutrons to break up the atom and so release an almost incredible amount of energy.

Uranium occurs in ore deposits in several minerals, the most common being uraninite, an oxide of uranium, which is found in crystals or in a dark pitch-like solid called pitchblende. A few crystals have been found in pegmatite near Wilberforce, Ontario, and large quantities of pitchblende have been mined near Great Bear Lake. The Belgian Congo has a great amount of the mineral, and some occurs in Saxony; Bohemia; Norway; the United States, and in other countries. Fine specimens of pitchblende from Great Bear Lake may be seen in the Royal Ontario Museum.

3 HUNTER, CONSIDER THE BIRD OF PREY

Large numbers of red-tailed hawk, rough-legged hawk and snowy owl, moving into southern Ontario during the winter, deserve more protection. Usually these large birds are killed because of their alleged attacks on poultry, but analyses of the stomach contents of these birds made at the Royal Ontario Museum show that their major prey is shrews and wild mice. The latter do much damage to fruit trees and shrubbery throughout the winter. In addition, the snowy owl kills large numbers of the brown rat—a dangerous pest.

To many persons, however, hawks and owls are intrinsically worth saving, even where the economic consideration is not clear. They are a beautiful and graceful part of our countryside. If all animals which fell foul of some special part of our interests were eradicated, this would be a dull and empty land for the lover of the out-of-doors.

4 MUSEUM PROGRAMME OUTLINED

Robert Fennell, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Royal Ontario Museum, appeared before the Royal Commission on Education on December 5th and presented plans for a broader Museum service. An increased budget, he said, would be necessary in order to make the Museum more useful to the people of Ontario. Travelling exhibits could be sent by truck or special railroad coach.

Other parts of the Museum's programme are:

- to open its doors to the public on certain evenings;
- to encourage Canadian industrialists to use the Museum's collections as a source of design;
- to issue more publications written in popular language;
- to increase the number of field explorations in the province;
- to foster handicrafts and hobbies;
- to provide greater space for exhibits and facilities for the expanding educational work.

In a letter to the *Toronto Star* of December 11th, J. S. Foulds, a member of the Board of Public School Trustees of Sault Ste Marie, expressed his appreciation of the Museum's travelling exhibit which had been sent to his city. He regretted that the Museum had been unable to repeat this service, owing to lack of funds. The Museum was a provincial institution, he declared, and "its unique educational facilities should be made available to all children in Ontario. I earnestly commend to anyone interested the active support of Mr. Fennell's representations to the Royal Commission on Education."

5 EUROPEAN MUSEUMS AND THE WAR

A first-hand report on various British and Continental museums was recently brought back by Dr. L. S. Russell, Assistant Director, Royal Ontario Museum of Palaeontology, who has returned to his post after three years of service with the Canadian Army. Dr. Russell found most of the museums in London closed to the public; their collections were in storage or disarranged. Minor bomb damage has been suffered by the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Natural History Museum. The Geological Museum has been occupied by military personnel. It will be some time before these institutions can be fully rehabilitated. The Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh is partly open to the public, and is in process of return to normal. It suffered no damage from enemy action. In Paris there was no actual destruction of museums, but lack of heating has been a serious problem. The Louvre is partly open, and all branches of the Museum d'Histoire naturelle except Palaeontology are accessible. In Brussels the Museo Royale d'Histoire naturelle was closed last winter, but it is now open, and material is being replaced. French and Belgium museum officials are eager to resume their work and to renew international contacts. Many German museums, such as the Senckenberg Museum at Frankfurt-a-M., and the Munich Museum, have been seriously damaged by bombing, and the Berlin Museum has been completely destroyed.

